

~~TOP SECRET~~

DRAFT

24 July 1964

SUBJECT: Proposed Addition to Briefing for the  
North Atlantic Council

1. As I am sure you know from recent press reports, Soviet Premier Khrushchev has said on several occasions that the United States also has a satellite reconnaissance program. Premier Khrushchev is correct about this. Satellite photographic reconnaissance is one of our valuable intelligence collection tools. We have been successful for several years in utilizing satellite photography, along with other intelligence collection activities, to provide us with information essential to the security of the United States and its allies. As you are aware, in the Soviet Union State secrecy is both a military resource and an historic policy. Because of this secrecy, the Free World is dependent upon intelligence resources to redress the disparity, and we have found satellite photography a useful addition to our other resources in this effort.

2. Satellite photographic reconnaissance, however, has a number of problems related to it and it

~~TOP SECRET~~

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~~TOP SECRET~~

has certain inherent shortcomings. In addition to being extremely expensive in materials and money, such a system is necessarily highly sophisticated in equipment and technique, and it is difficult to maintain a regularly scheduled program. Moreover, as our astronauts have observed during their earth orbits, the earth is at all times shrouded by large areas of cloud cover. This, added to the fact that through overhead photography one can identify a building but cannot determine what work is going on within it, constitute important limitations on satellite photography as an intelligence collection means.

3. Nevertheless, as I have said we regard this collection device as presently useful; we are confident that as its development proceeds over the next several years it will become increasingly valuable. Moreover, we consider it to be a legal and justifiable activity which violates no national sovereign territory. In support of this position, the United States has contended, in the United Nations and elsewhere, that outer space should be reserved for peaceful programs, that outer space is free and open for exploration by all states; and that we do not consider the use of photographic satellites to be illegal or aggressive.

~~TOP SECRET~~

28 July 1964

Dear Tommy:

As I told you on the phone Friday, it seemed to me that the proposed statement to the North Atlantic Council concerning our satellite photography went really further than it should in suggesting the extent to which satellite photography makes an input to our intelligence inventory and, in addition, would be a valuable means of policing disarmament agreements. It is this latter point which concerns me particularly and I think you will agree with me that the difficulty we have encountered in Cuba in disproving rumors and gossip and "proving the negative" is an indicator of the difficulties encountered in depending upon aerial photography as a total verification of resource.

Attached is a suggestion for a brief and more condensed statement which might be used with NAC. It may be that you will wish to expand this statement somewhat in order to meet the needs you feel so important. However, I would avoid the impression that satellite reconnaissance, good as it is, is in any way a substitute for on-site inspection.

Sincerely,

*JA* John

John A. McCone  
Director

**Attachment:** Proposed Addition to Briefing for the North Atlantic Council, 24 Jul 64

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